

**INTERNATIONAL ALBACORE WORKING GROUP MEETING (Dr. VidarWespestad)
DECEMBER 2005**

AFRF Fisheries Consultant, Vidar Wespestad, attended the 19th Albacore Working Group held November 28 to Dec. 2 at the Southwest Fisheries Science Center in La Jolla, CA. The meeting was an intersessional meeting devoted to reviewing research, updating and reviewing catch data, reviewing potential assessment models to apply in next year's stock assessment, and lastly discuss how to proceed on biological reference points.

In terms of data to review there was a report by Taiwan on studies of maturation in albacore. Histological investigations of gonads were conducted on 105 females and 115 males of North Pacific albacore collected during 2001-2005 from the Central and Western Pacific Ocean. Only samples from western North Pacific found females with reproductively-active ovaries. Thus, in the western North Pacific spawning area, spawning of North Pacific albacore occurred from March to September, with a peak in March and April. The estimated lengths at 50% maturity for females and males were 86 cm FL.

There was considerable discussion about designing a study to collect more maturity and other biological data. This might be a future project of AFRF to undertake. There is a strong need for this information and AFRF could take a lead in collecting this information aboard US vessels.

Japanese scientists reported new length-weight (L-W) relationships for North Pacific albacore and examined differences by sex, area, season and year for data from 1990 to 2004 were investigated. These data were discussed and were welcome, but the working group felt a more detailed analysis was warranted before adopting new relationships in the assessment.

There was a presentation on Taiwan CPUE data and efforts to filter the data and derive as much information on albacore from multi-species longline effort. There were some questions on methods used to filter the logbook data, but the working group felt it was a good step to improve the utility of the Taiwan logbook data for stock assessment

A day was taken up with examination of different types of age structured stock assessment models. The standard model run in previous years will be run next year along with a new model that has better statistical properties and better diagnostic feature. There will be a meeting in July in Nanaimo by a subset of the working group to configure and test the models for use in the November Working Group meeting.

Lastly, the subject of biological reference points was discussed, but the working group felt it needed direction from the Interim Science Committee (ISC) as to what procedure to follow to derive specific reference points and recommended levels of harvest. The U.S. presented similar information as presented at the ISC meeting earlier in the year as an example. Japanese scientists did not seem receptive to the proposal. If guidance is received from the ISC then potentially the albacore could be charged with developing reference points for review, but I expect this subject will receive considerable discussion by the ISC and the working group will not receive instructions in time for the next meeting.

The working group adjourned until the next meeting to be held in Shimizu Japan in November 2006.